

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Friday, December 18, 2009

Rural Health Clinics Support Health Care Access in Wyoming

An estimated 185,000 Wyoming citizens may have improved access to care since the number of Wyoming communities eligible to host Rural Health Clinics was increased earlier this year.

The primary benefit for Rural Health Clinics is higher Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates. Rural Health Clinic status may help a practice become more financially stable and able to treat more patients insured on government programs.

Governor Dave Freudenthal's request to designate additional areas of Wyoming as underserved was approved by U.S. Health Resources and Service Administration in March 2009. Currently, Wyoming has 16 Rural Health Clinics in eight counties. Rural Health Clinics can be an extension of an existing hospital, or can be privately or publicly owned.

"We're working hard to encourage existing clinics in the eligible areas to apply for Rural Health Clinic status," said Sharla Allen, Office of Rural Health manager with the Wyoming Department of Health. A 2008 study indicated an annual reimbursement increase of \$25,000 on average per clinic for patient care they already provide.

"We're also hopeful that new clinics may open as these areas may present a better financial outlook than before the new designation was approved, thus, increasing access to care in eligible local communities," Allen said

All primary care clinics in Albany, Crook and Sheridan counties are eligible to apply to the Office of Healthcare Licensing and Surveys to become certified Rural Health Clinics, as are clinics in eastern Uinta, southeastern Fremont and northern Campbell counties. A map showing the borders is available at <http://www.health.wyo.gov/rfhd/rural/HPSA.html> (click on the Primary Care HPSA map).

For more information, interested individuals can contact the Office of Rural Health at (307) 777-2930, or the Office of Healthcare Licensing and Surveys at (307) 777-7123. Information is also available online at: http://www.health.wyo.gov/rfhd/rural/Rural_Health_Clinics.html, and http://www.health.wyo.gov/ohls/Wyoming_Rural_Health_Clinic.html.

####